

# **PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

**2130 SW Fifth Avenue, Suite 224  
Portland, Oregon 97201**

**Telephone: (503) 326-6352**

*CHAIRMAN  
Jim Lone*

*VICE CHAIRMAN  
Hans Radtke*

Testimony of Mr. Jim Lone, Chairman  
Pacific Fishery Management Council  
to  
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
Field Hearing on the Decline of West Coast Groundfish  
Newport, Oregon

January 16, 2001

Senators:

My name is Jim Lone. I am chairman of the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Pacific Council). Thank you for this opportunity to offer comments related to the West Coast groundfish fishery.

This is a challenging time for fishery management on the West Coast. Several important groundfish stocks are in trouble.<sup>1/</sup> By federal definition, seven species have been designated to be in an overfished condition, with lengthy rebuilding timeframes ranging from 10 to 95 years. Three other major species have been determined to be significantly below (i.e., 60% below) healthy population status. In 2000, the Pacific Council notified the governors of the three West Coast states of a potential disaster in the groundfish fishing industry, and the U.S. Secretary of Commerce declared a commercial fishery failure in the West Coast groundfish fishery. In response, Congress appropriated \$5 million in disaster relief. The most likely cause of this crisis is the combined effects of a change in the ocean environment, inadequate scientific data collection and analysis, and a national policy that encouraged capital infusion into the fishing industry.

Problems in the groundfish fishery have far reaching impacts: collateral local businesses also suffer consequences; many small local fishing businesses are in danger of failing this year, or in the near future; and the national seafood supply is negatively affected. It is likely these negative impacts will continue for the foreseeable future. While economic estimates of total impacts are not currently available, it is safe to say the total is enormous.

---

1/ See Table 1.

What can and should be done about this serious problem? The Council's Groundfish Strategic Plan offers the best hope for improving the fishery and preventing harm to the individuals and communities dependent on the resource.

In 1999, the Council initiated development of a strategic plan to guide management of the West Coast groundfish fishery. This strategic plan was formulated to address current and future issues and concerns in the fishery. At its September 2000 meeting, after a series of public meetings,<sup>2/</sup> the Council adopted the Strategic Plan and approved a process for implementation of the plan.

The plan is intended to provide guidance for groundfish management in 2001 and beyond. It is intended to be a resource for Council efforts to rebuild depleted stocks and maintain healthy stocks. As a major feature, it provides guidance to reduce the size of the fishing fleet to a level that is both biologically sustainable for the resource and economically sustainable for the fishing community. The plan also calls for conservative fishing policies, establishment of marine reserves, and better science.

Overcapacity within the groundfish fleet is the paramount issue challenging the West Coast fishing industry, and this Council. For years, national policy encouraged industry growth and development as we "Americanized" the groundfish fishery. We didn't recognize quickly enough we had achieved that goal. The Pacific Council initiated steps to inhibit growth in the fishery by establishing a groundfish license limitation program that took effect in 1994. We also took steps toward better management of the sablefish fishery by developing an individual fishing quota (IFQ) program. We delayed action on the IFQ program in response to strong signals from Congress. With the 1996 reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, we lost the ability to implement an IFQ program. We are disappointed to see an extension of the moratorium on IFQ programs, but are encouraged and thankful for your efforts to provide an exemption for permit stacking in the West Coast sablefish fishery. We ask that you now help by supporting buyback programs and capacity reduction tools.

The Strategic Plan's vision for the future of the groundfish fishery assumes the plan's recommended actions will be fully funded and implemented. While the funding need is significant, the benefits from implementation of the Strategic Plan warrant this expense. We have not yet calculated the total amount needed for full implementation of the plan, and are exploring cooperative arrangements. However, it is certain additional Congressional

---

2/ See Table 2. Strategic Plan Process Timeline and Schedule

appropriations will be needed. We will be happy to provide a total estimate in the near future. At this time, we concur with estimates of \$500,000 in each of the next three years needed specifically for the Council to implement the plan. Additional amounts will also be needed to fund West Coast research and data needs.<sup>3/</sup>

The Council recognizes the transition to the future envisioned in the plan will require major changes in the structure and operation of the fishery, which will certainly have short-term, adverse effects on current participants and local communities. However, there is a darker vision, which could easily occur if we are not able to strategically alter the course of current management. That is, we could continue attempting to manage an overcapitalized fleet in the face of declining resource abundance and the necessity to meet stock rebuilding mandates. This will most certainly result in even shorter fishing seasons, smaller trip limits, higher discard rates, and the continuous inability to accurately account for fishery-related mortalities. Many people now actively fishing will not be able to meet their basic financial responsibilities and will be forced from the fishery by a governed economic demise or outright bankruptcy; impacts to coastal communities dependent on groundfish fisheries will be disastrous. The Pacific Council and participating agencies will be overwhelmed by the need to implement short-term fixes to long-term problems with little or no chance to focus on the underlying problems of the fishery or to develop a long-term management strategy. The Pacific Council's Strategic Plan sets a course for steering clear of this squall.

In summary, Senators, the Pacific Council faces a severe groundfish fishery problem in the near term, with seven species requiring rebuilding over the next 10 to 95 years and several other stocks hovering at threshold levels. Because depleted species are mixed with healthy stocks, all groundfish fisheries will be impacted by management measures aimed at rebuilding depleted stocks. We firmly believe the Groundfish Strategic Plan will, over the long term, help to rationalize the groundfish fishery by addressing the major groundfish issues and helping move the fisheries toward recovery and prosperity.

As I noted earlier, to implement the Groundfish Strategic Plan, we will likely need legislation and financial support to help reduce the number of fishing vessels that harvest fish off the West Coast and to collect the necessary data for competent management. We appreciate the

---

3/ The following letters document recent and future Council funding needs:

- (1) Letter of January 15, 2001 from Dr. Donald O. McIsaac, Executive Director, Pacific Fishery Management Council, to Ms. Penny Dalton and Dr. William Hogarth, NMFS.
- (2) Letter of December 22, 1998 from Mr. Lawrence D. Six, Executive Director, Pacific Fishery Management Council, to Dr. William Hogarth and Mr. Will Stelle, NMFS.

efforts and attention Congress has given to improve and guide our management, most notably, your current efforts to allow implementation of permit stacking in our fixed gear sablefish fishery. We know there are many other interests throughout the nation competing for your attention and funding. We hope our comments to you today have been helpful, and we will try to be responsive to any other information or input you may need. Thank you again for this opportunity. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Table 1. Groundfish Stocks – Overfished or Depressed

<u>Species</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Rebuilding Timeframe</u>
Lingcod	Overfished* (designated 1999)	10 years
Bocaccio	Overfished (designated 1999)	38 years
Pacific Ocean Perch	Overfished (designated 1999)	47 years
Canary Rockfish	Overfished (designated 2000)	37 years
Cowcod	Overfished (designated 2000)	95 years
Darkblotched Rockfish	Overfished (designated 2001)	To Be Determined
Widow Rockfish	Overfished (designated 2001)	To Be Determined
Shortspined Thornyhead	Below Target Biomass**	Not Applicable
Sablefish	Below Target Biomass	Not Applicable
Pacific Whiting	Below Target Biomass	Not Applicable

\* Stocks below 25% of virgin biomass.

\*\* Stocks below 40% of virgin biomass.

Table 2. Strategic Plan Process Timeline and Schedule

SEPTEMBER 1999		OCTOBER 1999		NOVEMBER 1999		DECEMBER 1999	
DATE	TASK	DATE	TASK	DATE	TASK	DATE	TASK
13-16	Facilitator conducts convening meetings with PFMC and Council Committee members	14	Convening summary document to Committee	1-5	Council meeting: provide update and status report on proposed framework; receive guidance and direction	14-15	Meeting to continue preparation of draft Strategic Plan, including brainstorming a range of options for addressing issues
17	Ad Hoc Committee meets to review convening process	18-19	Committee meeting to discuss results of convening process and begin developing strategic plan framework		Committee meeting to begin preparation of draft Strategic Plan; discuss issues, key questions, obstacles and barriers		
JANUARY 2000		FEBRUARY 2000		MARCH 2000		APRIL 2000	
DATE	TASK	DATE	TASK	DATE	TASK	DATE	TASK
17-18	Committee meeting to review, discuss, and revise proposed options and strategies	14-16	Committee meeting to continue development of proposed range of strategies; start to bring together the overall draft framework	6-10	Brief update at Council meeting	3-7	Update and Status Report at Council meeting.
				21	Conference call to discuss strategies and prepare for April meeting	18-19	Committee meeting to finalize proposed range of options and strategies; review overall draft plan
MAY 2000		JUNE 2000		JULY 2000		AUGUST 2000	
DATE	TASK	DATE	TASK	DATE	TASK	DATE	TASK
22-24	Committee meeting	14-15	Committee meeting		Conduct public hearings and involvement activities to encourage broad constituent review and comment of draft Strategic Plan		Conduct public hearings to encourage broad constituent review and comment of draft Strategic Plan
		26-30	Request Council approval of draft Strategic Plan (Council advisory review and comment)				
			Release for public review and comment				Committee meeting for review of comments; revise and finalize Strategic Plan
SEPTEMBER 2000		OCTOBER 2000		NOVEMBER 2000		DECEMBER 2000	
DATE	TASK	DATE	TASK	DATE	TASK	DATE	TASK

11-15	Seek final Council approval for Strategic Plan	Begin Strategic Plan implementation activities	Tasks to be determined	Tasks to be determined
-------	--	--	------------------------	------------------------